

Home Reading.

My Song.

I have loved flowers that fade,
Within whose magic tents
Rich hues have marriage made
With sweet unnumbered scents:
A joy of love at sight,
A honeymoon delight,
That ages in an hour—
My song be like a flower!

I have loved airs, that die
Before their charn is writ
Upon the liquid sky
Trembling with welcome it,
Notes, that with pulse of fire
Proclaim the spirit's desire,
Then die, and are nowhere—
My song be like an air!

Die, song, die like a breath,
And wither as a bloom:
Fear not a flowery death,
Dread not an airy tomb!
Fly with delight, fly hence!
Twas thine love's tender sense
To feast, and on thy bier
Beauty shall shed a tear.

—ROBERT BRIDGES.

The King and the Beggar.

AN ARAB STORY.

BY BISHOP FERRETTE.

THERE was once a king, from among the kings of Hind, who on a very hot summer day retired to an upper room for his siesta after dinner. He threw himself on a sofa, which occupied the greater part of a sort of bay-window projecting over the street, the like of which may be seen in many pictures of Oriental houses; but the heat was so intense on this burning afternoon, without a particle of breeze, that he could neither sleep nor even comfortably rest. So he clapped his hands, and a servant came. He ordered him to send two Circassian maids to fan him with fans made of ostrich feathers—the one kneeling at the head, and the other at the foot of his couch. They came, but they had no sooner begun to discharge their duties than he got tired of them, and wanted something else. So he sent them away, and again clapped his hands.

"What does your Serene Highness command?"

"I don't know. Bring me—my black mare. I will take a ride. No, by the bye, I won't. Bring me—what was I going to say?—the head of the Grand Mufti. No, the scoundrel deserves to be beheaded when I am not out of temper. Give me my inkstand, and leave me alone."

So the Mameluke took the king's silver inkstand—a richly-chiseled flat tube for the reeds used instead of pens, with the ink-bottle at one end of it—laid it on the sofa beside the king, retired a few steps toward the king's dressing-room, and laid down his head. The king, however, did not sleep. He took the inkstand, opened it, and drew it with a pen, against the wall, and again tried to sleep, but could not. He felt restless, and he began to think of the Grand Mufti's head, which he had ordered to be brought. He took a sheet of paper and a pair of Persian scissors from the shelf, and went back to the sofa, where he sat, and began to trim the paper preparatory to writing—a preliminary operation which Orientals seldom omit.

When the sheet of paper was brought to a shape to suit him, he began to write some words with red ink, and some with black. Oriental kings are generally very good calligraphers, and take daily lessons in calligraphy from a master of that art, who is one of their most habitual attendants. When he had written about three lines, he got displeased with them. So he tore the paper up, and threw the pieces upon the floor. Then picking up one of the narrow slips about six inches long by one finger wide which had fallen off in trimming the paper, he wrote upon it, "The world is a shadow and a sham and a game of wits.—Ahmad." This latter word was his own name. Then he rolled the slip of paper round his finger, threw it out of the window, lay down again, tried to sleep, and slept.

On that very same day a poor beggar, very tired, as he came from very far, entered the royal city, where he had not a friend. Hungry and thirsty and footsore, he walked for some time through the burning streets, which were all deserted at this time, as it was a little after noonday, and every inhabitant was either at his dinner or at his siesta. Finally, finding no one to direct him, he sat down at the foot of a wall, where a bay window overhanging the street projected, the most propitious shade that could be seen for a distance. He began to ponder his forlorn condition and pondered over his miserable prospects, when, lo! across the street flew a small ball of paper, coming from above his head, and falling about ten steps from the place where he was squatting. Would he rise, and pick it up to see what it was? Hardly worth the while. Still "Let us see," said he; and he rose painfully, walked footsorely, stooped grudgingly, picked up the paper, came back to sit where he had been, unrolled the paper, and read—

"The world is a shadow and a sham and a game of wits.—Ahmad."

"He who wrote this must have been in a fit of bad humor," said the beggar. "But who can be this man Ahmad? Probably the owner of this house. I should like to ask."

The hour of the siesta was now over. The streets began again to be crowded; the shops were opened, and people began to buy and sell, and to lie and to quarrel, and to bargain, and to ask three times the value of an article, and to offer the tenth part of the price demanded—all the ordinary incidents of an Eastern bazaar. The beggar rose from his seat, and asked a passer-by, "Is the name of the owner of this house Ahmad?"

"Speak not so loud," said the passer-by. "This house is the palace of our lord the Sultan, Ahmad Khan."

"God save thy tongue," said the beggar, the usual mode of thanking for a piece of information.

"The Sultan Ahmad Khan!" muttered the beggar to himself, as he walked along. "So kings and beggars have their bitter hours alike. Let us, therefore, never be dejected. This paper is certainly an instruction to him who is capable of being taught."

So he walked on along the bazar, looking at the shops. When he passed before cooks' shops, the smell of the viands excited his appetite, which did not require that solicitation; but he passed on; for he had not the slightest coin to purchase anything. At last he stopped before the shop of a merchant, whose benign countenance seemed to invite even a beggar to speak, and not to be afraid.

"What can I do for you, my lord?" said the merchant to the beggar; for Orientals are the acme of politeness to everybody.

"I wish to ask," said the beggar, "whether you know where I could find a house in this city to rent?"

"What sort of a house do you wish?" said the merchant, looking at the inquirer's poor accoutrements.

"The best that can be found in the city," said the beggar, who, perceiving the impression which the latter words had produced, quickly added, by way of modest apology, "save the house of our lord the Sultan, Ahmad Khan."

"Then," said the merchant, "the dress which you wear had surely at first led me to some mistake as to your real position. Excuse me, if—"

"No excuse," said the beggar. "It is entirely my fault. I should have begun by explaining to you how I came to wear these rags; but having worn them now for three days, I have really come to be so accustomed to them that I entirely forgot to think how much the sight of them must shock others. I need not say that I am not a beggar, but a rich merchant, who have come in advance of my caravan, out of fear that should it be overtaken by brigands, besides losing it, I should myself be put to ransom. I have reached this city safely, thanks to my disguise! My caravan will be here in four days; and I must immediately hire a house for myself, and a caravansary for my camels. I intend to make here a long stay while I sell my goods. So, if any of your acquaintance has a house for rent suitable to my rank, be so kind as to let me know."

"My lord," said the merchant, "I know a house which would exactly suit you. It is not for rent, but the owner of it would, perhaps, let it in order to accommodate such a distinguished stranger as your serenity. I will close my shop, and accompany you to the place. But you will perhaps excuse me if I venture a suggestion. These clothes that you wear might appear rather strange, and you had, perhaps, better procure more suitable ones before you engage in looking for a house, or in any other business."

"I approve your suggestion," said the beggar. "Can you accompany me to the bazaar, and recommend to me a clothier's shop where I might get a suitable dress?"

"My lord," said the merchant, "you had better not even present yourself at a tailor's shop in your present costume. I can lend to you a suit of clothes of mine, which will be nearly of the proper size. Just come to my house and have some refreshment, and then I will accompany you to the bazaar."

So it was done. About two hours after, the merchant and his guest issued from the bath, both very creditably dressed, specially the beggar, who was in the merchant's best.

"Now," said the merchant, "we must go to my house again, and have two horses saddled, and take with us my servants; for it would not do for a man of our quality to go looking for a house otherwise than on horseback, and with attendants."

About half an hour later two gentlemen rode along the streets of the city, preceded and followed by several servants; and a runner armed with a stick, went ahead of the procession, delivering blows right and left, and shouting, "Place, place, for the Khowadjah Shahr!"

They alighted at the door of the wealthiest inhabitant of the place, where they were both received with the greatest honors, the beggar on his own personal account, and the merchant as the companion of his distinguished guest. The owner of the house did not intend to let it, yet for the sake of the honor of putting under obligations a man of the standing of Khowadjah Shahr, he would let it for a fabulous sum, which he named. The beggar, now become the Khowadjah Shahr, took him at his word, and asked how much more he would have to pay for the furniture, as he wanted to take possession of the house as it was—furniture, and plate, and linen, and servants, and all. The owner again named his price, which was accepted without discussion, on which the house and all were declared to have been let to the Khowadjah Shahr, who was now the host of him of whom he had been a moment before the visitor. Shahr began to do the honors of his house with that graceful dignity which in the East is common to the highest classes and to the lowest. There the poorest beggar is every inch a gentleman, save the money.

Shahr also purchased the horses of the owner of the house; and as all that he now had was not sufficient for him to hold his rank, several of the merchants of the town were sent for, and came with their wares, which they displayed under the *ivan* and in the courtyard. All the leading usurers of the city came to offer to him large sums of money at enormous rates of interest. He objected, not to the interest, but to the loans themselves, saying, "I will not take the money that he wanted. But his friend, the merchant, whispered in his ear that it was fashionable for great people to patronize banks by borrowing large sums; and that, by this interesting the capitalists of the city in his welfare, he would secure a better and more ready sale for his goods when they came. So he allowed the loans to be forced upon him, and also sold for each part of the goods which were to come with his caravan. He at the same time bought, partly on credit and partly for cash, but invariably at fabulous prices,

many articles of jewelry and clothing: books of poetry and prose, of science, history, and fiction; musical instruments; chiseled swords and gold-embroidered saddles; china vases; several most costly horses; four beautiful Georgian girls, every one with four Nubian maids to attend her; several male servants and eunuchs; and carpets and furniture of all sorts to replace those articles which he found fault with. All his arrangements being now complete, he declared himself ready to receive the congratulatory visits of all the great people of the city, who all came in great ceremony, and accompanied with many servants, to express to him how much every one felt honored at his taking his abode in the city. Shahr, in the mean time, had given orders to his attendant to hire armed men and horses and mules and tents, and provisions for travel, as he must immediately start to meet his caravan. On the second day of his arrival, he was already on his journey. "It is by this punctual attendance to business that I have made all my fortune," said he; and parents quoted this saying, and all his moral sayings, to their sons.

Shahr, before starting, had made an arrangement with his friend the merchant that the latter should, on the morrow of his departure, despatch to him a swift horseman with a secret message about the latest prices current, or some such matter. When this message came, Shahr received him privately, and, after paying him liberally, ordered him to return immediately to the city without speaking to any members of the escort. When the messenger was out of sight, he ordered all his escort to take a new direction, as the letter he had just received required it. But he said nothing of the object of this new journey; only, from his demeanor, his retainers judged that it must be a matter of some great moment—such, perhaps, as a political mission.

They traveled for several weeks in this new direction, camping every night, until they reached a large city, which they did not enter, but, by the orders of Shahr, pitched their tents and shacked their horses in a garden outside near the river. As soon as the news was spread in the city of the arrival of a distinguished traveler with a large retinue, all the notable inhabitants came in succession to pay their respects to Shahr, who received them with the dignity becoming to his rank.

All the notable inhabitants came, I said, but with, however, one exception. The pacha came not; for, with regard to him, the etiquette of the country differed from what it was with other persons. He was to receive the first visit, and return it. As Shahr did not call on him on the first nor on the second day, some of his visitors several times mentioned the pacha in their conversations, meaning it as a hint. But Shahr seemed not to catch it; only, whenever the mention came, the smile died on his lips, and his countenance took the expression, not of fear for himself, but of sorrow for somebody else. This was necessarily reported to the pacha, who grew quite uneasy about it, and sent some emissaries, apparently as visitors, but in reality on an errand of inquiry. Shahr was not the man not to perceive all this. His answers to those emissaries were evasive, but such as to convey an impression that there was something awful in store for the pacha, and that Shahr was sorry to have to play a part in it, but must.

Toward the end of the second day, when the visitors were quite many, and Shahr held open court under a tree at his tent-door, the mention of the pacha came again; and Shahr, seeming to have made up his mind to wait no longer, said in a quiet, but slowly and clearly articulated manner, "I had expected the visit of my friend the pacha before this time; but, as I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing him, I suppose the business which detained him must have been very urgent. Shakkur and As'ad" (speaking to two of his janissaries), "go to the pacha's palace, salute his highness, and tell him that the servant of his majesty the Sultan expects his visit promptly." Shakkur and As'ad bowed and went. The visitors seemed thunderstruck, but had soon made up their minds as to the course to follow. Some of them found a pretext to shorten their visit to Shahr; and of these some went to the pacha to offer their condolences and their help. These were his true friends; but they were few. A large number, who had been concerned in the defalcations and exactions which invariably take place under any pacha's administration, and are punished by his successor, merely to make place for new frauds, and for a new set of thieves, went home hastily, took some money and valuables, and started for the country or the mountains. The remainder kept their seats, or drew closer to Shahr, and continued to pay their court to him with renewed intensity.

When the pacha received the message, he said, "Suman wata'ah!" ("I hear and obey") and "Tuna bilahi wailayhi inna raji'un." ("We belong to God, and unto Him do we return.") When a Mohammedan has uttered this last sentence, he is no more unprepared for anything that may happen. He refused to take his guard with him, and went with the few friends who had remained faithful to misfortune. The news of his fall had already been spread through the city. So on his passage he was treated very differently from what he had been accustomed to. No honors were paid to him as to an official person. Of those who met him on the street, some shunned his glance, and took another way. Others seemed really sorry for him; but their expression was that of mute respect. Some who had been wronged, or justly punished, by him or by his officers, expressed their satisfaction with different degrees of vindictiveness. But the mass merely looked serious, and thought that, all being done by Allah, it was not for his servants to exult over him who fell.

Shahr went into his tent to receive the pacha. When the latter entered, Shahr was sitting at the head of his divan; and his first movement was to rise as a mark of respect to a fellow-dignitary, even if disgraced; but he seemed to repress with regret that first movement, and rose not. This completed the conviction of the pacha that doom was impending. He

saluted, stood in the middle, and was not invited to sit. He said, "May the will of God and of our lord the Sultan be done," and, having said this, burst into tears, which rolled in big hot drops on his gray beard. He lost all self-control, and wished to throw himself at the feet of Shahr. Shahr, who was also visibly affected, ordered him to remain standing.

"The painful necessity of delivering my message from the Sultan," said Shahr, "shall be spared to me, as you are already informed of it. I shall only have the regret of executing it. In all other respects hold me as a friend." Having said this, he ordered his guards to seize upon the person of the pacha and put him in chains, after which he and all his retinue marched through the city to the palace, accompanied by the prisoner. Everywhere everybody made it a point to welcome the new master with all the appearances of joy and submission. Shahr took possession of all the branches of the administration, removing some officers, appointing some, and maintaining others. He proved a wise ruler, encouraged agriculture and commerce, gave security to roads, and kept strict justice. The country flourished under his administration, and attained an unprecedented degree of prosperity. Everybody was highly satisfied.

The former pacha was kept in chains in the prison of the palace, but with all the consideration due to his former rank, so far as this was compatible with the orders of his majesty the Sultan. He was allowed books; and his friends and relatives were permitted to visit him at certain hours. Even Shahr Pacha occasionally condescended to go and spend an hour in confabulating with his prisoner, expressing the hope soon to receive such orders from the Sultan as to be able to bring his captivity to an end, or further alleviate it.

Things went on in this manner for very nearly a year; and it was now time to send to the Sultan the yearly tribute of the province.

Shahr, therefore, gave the usual orders to collect the tribute, and prepare a large caravan of camels to carry it, with an escort of horsemen to accompany it. When all was ready, he wrote a letter as follows:

"To the Only Sultan and Unique Hakkan, Our Lord Ahmad Khan, may God grant him victory!"

"His servant Shahr Pacha, after presenting the homage, etc., sets forth that, according to what is due to the honor of our noble master the Sultan, we have sent herewith, under the care of the secretary of our Khazindar, the yearly tribute of this province; and, as a mark of our entire submission to our lord the Sultan, we have added to it twenty-five camels loaded with the products of the manufactures of Hindostan and Farsistan which are the personal gift of our own humility. And also, according to the orders of your highness, we send to you the person of Mahmoud Pacha, whom we were sent to supersede, bound in chains, and under safe escort, to be treated as our lord the Sultan shall ordain. God make the Sultan victorious!"

When this letter reached the Sultan, and he found it sealed with the name of Shahr Pacha, a personage of whom he had never heard, he doubted at first his being awake. But having been assured by his reliable vizir that he was, and seeing, as a confirmation, the caravan and the tribute, which were all in order, and the escort, and the old pacha himself, he thought that nothing was to be hastily done before he thoroughly investigated this matter. So he ordered the old pacha to his presence; and the pacha came trembling for his neck. But the king having assured him of his forgiveness, and commanded him to speak freely, the pacha began to praise his successor in the highest terms, lauding the wisdom and efficiency and integrity of his government, and especially his kindness to a prisoner. The Sultan again began to think he was dreaming; but all his counsellors, who were gray-bearded and wise men, assured him that he was not. So he thought he would take their word, and dictated the following letter:

"The Illustrious, the Wise, the Victorious, the Only Sultan and Unique Hakkan, the Glorious Padishah and King of Kings, Ahmad Khan."

"To our servant the High Shahr Pacha, (May God prolong his duration!) In a favorable season, etc., we have received the letter of your serenity, and at the same time the tribute of your province, and the present from your highness; and the whole was as it should have been. And we have also received the person of Ex-Pacha Mahmoud, sent by you according to our orders. And, as the matter concerning him has by this time passed from our imperial memory, we command you to come here with all the witnesses and documents in this affair, and with as many of our soldiers as will form an escort suitable to your rank. Be of health."

When Shahr Pacha received this letter, he rose from his seat, placed the letter upon his head in sign of obedience, and ordered it to be read aloud in presence of all his court. He then said, "As our lord the Sultan, in addition to all other marks of his condescension toward us, has also judged us worthy to be summoned to his presence, let all the preparations be made according to the orders of his majesty the Sultan." So he started a few days after with a magnificent escort of horsemen, and with mules and camels and tents and servants, and the richest present for the king. Several weeks were spent in the journey. When he reached the capital city, all the people went out of the gates to welcome him and enjoy the pageant. No such entry of any one less than an emperor had ever been witnessed; and such were the reports of the magnificence of the display, that the king himself was several times tempted to leave the place, and go in disguise among the crowd to witness it, instead of waiting in his palace the visit of Shahr Pacha, as was becoming to his dignity.

Finally Shahr came, and, having left his shoes at the door, entered alone into the divan chamber. He prostrated himself before the Sultan, and then stood before him with his hands crossed upon his breast in the attitude of an humble servant. All the courtiers sat on the divans around the room, or stood, according to their various ranks.

"We have heard," said the king, "of the prosperity of your province and of the justice of your administration, for which we express our gratitude to Allah (may he be exalted); and we have summoned you to bear witness in the case of your predecessor. But before we proceed farther," said the king with a searching look of authority, "we wish to know by whose orders you have been appointed."

All the audience held their breaths. Shahr answered—

"As to the prosperity of our government, the rule is the rule of God. There is no ruler but him, and between him and us his slaves, our lord the glorious Sultan."

"As to the witnesses and documents concerning the conduct of our predecessor, we have brought them according to the orders of my lord the victorious Sultan; and, lo! they are present."

"And as to the authority by which we have been appointed, lo! it is the authority of our lord the Sultan; and we possess his noble sign to this effect in this firm which we have brought with us in this gold casket, and which we will now have the honor of displaying before our lord the Sultan."

Shahr then opened the casket and took from it a large envelope of silk, which he opened, and, lo! in it another envelope of gold cloth. He kissed it, placed it on his head, then opened it; and, lo! in it the smallest possible roll of paper, which he unrolled into a slip about six inches long by two-thirds of an inch wide, which he presented to the Sultan, who read—

"The world is a shadow and a sham and a game of wits.—Ahmad."

"This," said Shahr, "is the imperial firm under which I have acted."

The Sultan at first was surprised; but he recognized his own imperial handwriting and signature; and when Shahr had told him his whole story, and how he came into possession of the firm, his majesty remembered on what occasion it had been issued. There was no doubt about it. It was a legitimate firm; and Shahr was the legitimate pacha of the province he had so well governed. All his conduct had been strictly legal.

The Sultan ordered Shahr to remain in the palace as his imperial guest during two weeks before he should return to his province, which could not spare him longer. During this time, Shahr Pacha received the visits of all the great people of the capital, and embraced this opportunity for settling the numerous bills that he had left behind, when he first honored the city with his presence. He made many other purchases, for which, this time, he invariably paid cash. He departed with his escort at the end of the fifteen days, loaded with the presents of his sovereign and the good wishes of all the people. All the city accompanied him a mile or two beyond the gates.

Shahr Pacha continued to be a good ruler. In the chronicles of his province he is called Shahr the Just, to distinguish him from another Shahr Pacha, who held the government before or after him.

The glory of power did not make Shahr forget the practice of devotion, of which he had always been a fervent adept. He founded an order of dervishes, for whom he endowed several convents, and which is still influential in the country. That order has some peculiar customs and practices. In one of the mosques of the order, Shahr was buried according to his wish. He bequeathed to the library of the convent attached to that mosque the casket of gold with the three envelopes, respectively of silk and silver and gold cloth, and the firm contained in them, which had been the foundation of the fortune of his house; for Shahr left behind him a numerous and lasting and influential posterity. The good monks still keep among their relics the precious casket, and unroll before strangers the slip of paper, on which can be read in the best calligraphy these words in Arabic:

"AL ALAM HIJR WAFIJR, WAHAILAMAH, which may be translated: "THE WORLD IS A SHADOW AND A SHAM AND A GAME OF WITS."

An Old Legend.

A man was walking along one road and a woman along another. The roads finally united, and the man and the woman reached the junction at the same time, walked on from there together. The man was carrying a large iron kettle on his back; in one hand he held by the legs a live chicken, in the other a cane; and he was leading a goat. Just as they were coming to a deep, dark ravine, the woman said to the man:

"I am afraid to go through that ravine with you; it is a lonely place, and you might overpower me and kiss me by force."

"If you were afraid of that," said the man, "you shouldn't have walked with me at all. How can I possibly overpower and kiss you by force, when I have this great iron kettle on my back, a cane in one hand and a live chicken in the other, and am leading this goat? I might as well be tied hand and foot."

"Yes," replied the woman; "but if you should stick your cane in the ground and tie the goat to it, and turn the kettle bottom side up and put the chicken under it, then you might wickedly kiss me in spite of my resistance."

"Success to thy ingenuity, O woman," said the rejoicing man to himself; "I should never have thought of this expedient."

And when he came to the ravine he stuck his cane in the ground and tied the goat to it, gave the chicken to the woman, saying, "Hold it while I cut some grass for the goat," and then, lowering the kettle from his shoulders, imprisoned the fowl under it, and wickedly kissed the woman, as she was afraid he would.—*Circassian Legends.*

A RISING INDIGNATION. — Isn't it about time for the local authorities to sell the male used to draw the town hearse, and buy a horse? asks the editor of a Tennessee paper. "Twice lately he has balked and detained processions on bitterly cold days for over an hour, and only last week he kicked in the front of the vehicle and seriously damaged the corpse. People are beginning to get enough of this sort of thing, and if the authorities don't take proper action, a citizens' meeting will be called."